Cobra Kite

By Mahani Zubaidy Gunnell Art by Cheryl Kirk Noll

*In parts of rural Malaysia, the string used to fly a kite is coated with ground glass. When a kite is flown, it is inviting others to a kite fight. The fliers usually do not know who owns the other kites. They do know that if they lose the fight, they lose their kites. Depending on the strength and sharpness of the string, the skill of the flier, and the quality of the kite, one or more kites may be cut off in midair and fall to the ground. When this happens, folks young and old dash pell-mell to claim the fallen kites.*



I was throwing paddy to the chickens when I saw the kites: Cobra Kite and Moon Kite. They said Cobra Kite had a cobra's head on it, but you couldn't see it from the ground. No other kite was black and had a tail so long. So when Cobra was up, you would recognize it, no problem.

Moon Kite looked like two half-moons, one behind the other. My father said that was a traditional design. When he was a little boy, every house in the village had a moon kite, and after the rice harvest the kites filled the sky.

This moon kite was probably pretty in its own way. Its flier seldom showed any tricks, though some people said he was an old hand and knew everything there was to know about kites. When the wind changed, Moon Kite danced a little, but mostly it stayed quite still in the sky. To me it looked as if Moon Kite's owner had tied it to a pole and watched it while he drank tea.

Since Cobra Kite was zig-zagging up and up, I was surprised Moon Kite didn't leave the sky. Cobra Kite had cut three kites in that week alone.

I stopped feeding the chickens. Sure enough, Cobra was on the attack. You could tell when it flew near the other kite and waited, its tail wriggling as if it were picking energy from the sky and bringing it to the head before it attacked. Then, with a swoop, Cobra lunged toward Moon Kite, but nothing happened.

Cobra struck again. This time both kites dropped and floated.

"Yea, Cobra!" I clapped my hands and danced around the chickens. Then I saw that Moon Kite was soaring straight and steady like a rocket while Cobra was falling down, down, down like a sad, giant leaf.

I couldn't believe my eyes. The king of kites had been beaten. I stood and stared at the sky with my mouth open. Luckily my legs took over. I bounded out of the yard and raced down the field between the row of Chinese shop houses and the village.

Cobra was over the field and falling fast. I ran faster. I prayed that the others would be slow; that whoever had seen the kite fight was far away and would not get to Cobra before I did.

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As Cobra dropped, I cut into the village. Right then my trouble started. All I could see were tree-tops, roofs, and sky--no Cobra. Just a flash of its wonderful tail was all I needed.

"Please," I prayed, "don't let Cobra get stuck in a tree."

Next thing I knew I was by the village headman's poultry yard. His geese honked and hissed. They stretched their necks and shook their heads. Good thing they were in the pen. But their din was nothing compared to the shouts I began to hear. The others were close!

The first shout seemed far, but the ones that followed came from different directions and were very loud. My knees went soft. Why did I even think I could get that kite?

Suddenly, with a *crack* Cobra nose-dived into the headman's pen. The gander and the three other geese flapped their wings and honked even louder. I heard someone shout "There!" and I stopped thinking. I lifted the pen's wire gate and marched straight for Cobra. One of the geese followed me and pinched my calf.

I told myself it didn't hurt.

I grabbed Cobra and looped the bridle line around my arm until it was tight. The glassed string stung and itched. Sweat and dye made green patches on my arms and fingers. I was the happiest girl in the world.

I was surrounded by people as I left the pen.

"What is this? A child's got the kite," said a man who was not from our village.

"What are you going to do with it? Decorate the house?"

Everyone laughed. Someone said, "The kite is as big as she is." By then even some who had not been chasing Cobra had arrived because of the noise. A woman said, "Wah, the Cobra's head is well drawn."

"Yes, yes," said another, "done by a master."

"Come, little girl," said a deep voice. "I'll give you two *wau kecil*, and you give me the Cobra." Later he offered three of those kites.

I held tight. I could make *wau kecil* kites myself, but not one like Cobra. I could not afford to buy one as big and strong either. Not even for ten *wau kecil* would I give up my Cobra.

Then I heard the headman's voice. "Enough, enough," he said. "She got it; it is hers. End of story." He was not a dishonest man. He wanted the right person to have the kite.

The people in the crowd slowly moved away. Some of the village children followed me home. Adil, the headman's grandson, helped hold Cobra's tail. His little sister ran and skipped by my side.

I took big steps and held Cobra to the side to make walking easier, but inside I was skipping and jumping and dancing all the way home.

1. Read the sentence from the story.

**Just a flash of its wonderful tail was all I needed.**

If *wonder* means “amazed” or “amazement”, what does *wonderful* mean?

1. full of amazement
2. without amazement
3. in a way that is amazed
4. a person who is amazed

1. Read these sentences from the story.

**Good thing they were in the pen. But their din was nothing compared to the shouts I began to hear.**

Which of the following context clues would be used to define the word *din*?

1. compared
2. good
3. shouts
4. pen
5. Read these sentences from the story.

**I bounded out of the yard and raced down the field between the row of Chinese shop houses and the village.**

What is the meaning of the word *bounded* as used in the sentence above?

1. chased
2. jumped
3. slipped
4. tied
5. Read this sentence from the story.

**I was the happiest girl in the world.**

Which word has the SAME base word as *happiest*?

1. angriest
2. hairy
3. happening
4. unhappy
5. Read these sentences from the story.

**He was not a dishonest man. He wanted the right person to have the kite.**

If *honest* means “to tell the truth”, what does *dishonest* mean?

1. to not tell the truth
2. to tell the truth again
3. a person who tells the truth
4. to tell the truth before someone else
5. What is the MOST LIKELY reason the author wrote the story “Cobra Kite”?
6. to teach readers how to have a kite fight
7. to explain how to make a traditional kite
8. to provide an example of why kites can be dangerous
9. to tell a story about a young girl who does not give up
10. Which event occurs AFTER the geese honk louder, but BEFORE the girl lifts the pen’s wire

gate?

1. The girl hears shouting.
2. The girl grabs the cobra kite.
3. The girl gets pinched on the leg by the geese.
4. The girl cuts through the village trying to catch the kite.
5. How does the girl feel at the end of the story?
6. exhausted
7. frustrated
8. pleased
9. relieved

1. Which pair of words from the story is most OPPOSITE in meaning?
2. offered, stared
3. soaring, falling
4. raced, marched
5. skipping, dancing
6. How do the villagers feel when they discover that it is a little girl who caught the large cobra kite?
7. delighted
8. furious
9. surprised
10. upset

Answer Key

1. Correct Answer is A, DOK 2
2. Correct Answer is C, DOK 2
3. Correct Answer is B, DOK 2
4. Correct Answer is D, DOK 2
5. Correct Answer is A, DOK 2
6. Correct Answer is D, DOK 2
7. Correct Answer is A, DOK 2
8. Correct Answer is C, DOK 2
9. Correct Answer is B, DOK 2
10. Correct Answer is C, DOK 2